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REMEMBERING THE FATHER OF MR. GRAPE NUTS

By Paul Marion

LOWELL, MA - "That's the father of Mr. Grape Nuts," explains a mother to her son as they stand before a statue at the Will Rogers Memorial in Claremore, Oklahoma.

This anecdote comes from Dr. Howard Moore, an English Professor at the University of Lowell and Chelmsford resident, who has written a booklet about the Rogers Memorial.

Dr. Moore had done some research and writing on Will Rogers, and first visited the place while driving across country in 1970. "I was struck by the tone of the Memorial" writes Moore in the introduction to his booklet, The Will Rogers Memorial 1938-1975: Phase One -- Getting It All Together. So impressed was he with Paula Love and Robert Love, curator and manager respectively, that he decided to chronicle their work to establish, develop, and maintain it.

"Nothing needs to be said about Will Rogers and his impact upon the world, but in this booklet a few words can be said about the unparalleled dedication of Robert and Paula Love to making a true Memorial to Oklahoma's great son and America's favorite son," he writes.

Dr. Moore portrays the husband and wife team as tireless devotees to the legacy of Will Rogers, "a man of his times who was welcome in European capitals, a friend to Presidents, and a national hero," in Moore's words.

Richard Ketcham, in Will Rogers - The Man and His Times, says, "He was the most beloved figure of his time....Tens of millions who had never met him personally considered him their friend, having come to realize he had a way of speaking for them all."

The Loves were an obvious choice to manage the Memorial when it was constructed in 1938. "They had Will Rogers right up completely; they knew him; they loved him, and they knew exactly what to do," says Will Rogers, Jr., well known for his television commercials. Paula was also Will Rogers' niece.

The character of Mr. and Mrs. Love impressed Dr. Moore. They were evidence that "people can be in a public position and be people of integrity." The Memorial was established by Oklahoma after the federal government declined to support the idea. The Loves transformed it from a showcase for saddles and Rogers paraphernalia into a museum and library where admirers and scholars could re-enter the life and times of the cowboy-philosopher, famous for such golden lines as "I never met a man I didn't like."

Bob Love was thoroughly committed to his work and expected the same from his employees. Once, talking about an office worker, Love said to Moore, "She won't last long -- she gets to work at eight in the morning. Know what time she is supposed to start? Eight o'clock."

In the booklet, Dr. Moore relates how Paula and Bob built the Memorial's collection, acquiring films, photos, newspaper articles, whatever material they could locate. "The character of the Memorial was set by Paula and Bob... a tone of excellence," says Will Rogers, Jr.

As one staff member recalls, "Paula and Bob very seldom took a vacation -- seven days a week job -- twenty four hours a day for thirty-five or forty years."

Howard Moore's booklet is essentially a memorial to the keepers of the Memorial. Sadly, the Loves never saw this public tribute in print. Bob saw transcriptions of his taped interviews, but he and his wife died before the pamphlet appeared in 1980.

The story is sprinkled with memorable scenes and anecdotes of the Loves at work: The years spent reading old issues of the New York Times and Tulsa World, searching page by page for articles about Rogers; rescuing copies of his films from dark closets in Hollywood; building the cases themselves for the dioramas which depict the life of Will Rogers; and in the earliest days, an image of Bob out in the rainy night, spreading hay on the unlandscaped grounds so the crowds would not have to stand in mud the next day.

William Penn Adair Rogers (1879-1935), actor, author, humorist, national and world celebrity, will always be remembered -- in large part due to the contribution of Paula and Bob Love, rare individuals.

It is said of Rogers that "He was a kind of gentle, smiling deputy for everyone who was little or had once been little..."

Howard Moore has guaranteed that the Loves will be remembered, too, with his unique publication honoring these examples of the "little people" in the world who make so much happen -- the kind of people who always saw Will Rogers as their champion.